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**Opinion - Wednesday, November 12, 2003**

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## N.J. senators working to save drug benefits

### LETTERS

A Senate version of Medicare reform legislation is being debated in Congress.

The New Jersey State AFL-CIO applauds the fight in Washington, D.C., led by U.S. Sens. Jon Corzine and Frank Lautenberg to preserve and protect retirees from losing pharmaceutical prescription drug benefits that seniors currently enjoy and on which their lives often depend.

We thank Corzine and Lautenberg for introducing the PAAD Provision in S.1, the Prescription Drug and Medicare Improvement Act of 2003. This creative initiative allows state prescription drug programs to achieve the same status and be treated, administratively, like employer-provided prescription drug plans through which Medicare recognizes and pays retired workers' drug benefits.

### Sharing your opinions

We welcome your comments on editorials, columns, and other material that has appeared in The Daily Journal or any topics important to you.

Only submissions that include name, address, and day and evening phone numbers, and that are verified by The Daily Journal will be considered for publication. All submissions may be edited for length, accuracy and clarity.

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The provision introduced by our senators specifies that the three states with the largest state pharmaceutical drug plans (New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania) will continue to administer Medicare prescription drug benefits to those senior citizens currently receiving pharmaceutical benefits through state plans.

In New Jersey, more than 220,000 low- and moderate-income seniors and disabled citizens receive their drug benefits through our state's PAAD and Senior Gold plans. These plans are two of the nation's oldest and most comprehensive prescription drug programs. The senators' thoughtful amendment keeps New Jersey's seniors in the PAAD/Senior Gold programs with no loss of benefits or administrative disruption.

Enactment of the Corzine-Lautenberg language in S.1 also allows New Jersey to receive more than \$300 million annually in federal funds, based on a risk adjusted per capita subsidy from Medicare. This enables our state to continue providing prescription drug programs through PAAD and the Senior Gold programs, which cost nearly \$460 million to operate in FY2003.

In these times of great fiscal demands on our state's budget, obtaining money from federal sources frees up significant state resources for use to expand and strengthen our programs, and extend them to even more senior citizens.

Our state's retirees deserve access to the medicines, which they need to maintain healthy, productive and independent lives. Providing prescription drug benefits is the right thing to do.

The New Jersey State AFL-CIO salutes Corzine and Lautenberg for proposing the PAAD Provision in S.1, which goes a long way toward resolving this important, difficult and costly problem facing our seniors today.

**Charles Wowkanech**

**President**

**New Jersey State AFL-CIO**

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